

Final Push for Farm Funds by Trust

By KEITH L. MARTIN

From speeches at last June's Special Town Meeting to standing outside in the winter chill last month, members of the Wildlands Trust have weathered it all to implore Duxbury citizens to do what they can to save the O'Neil dairy farm.

With nearly four million dollars collected, the non-profit conservation organization is looking for the final sum that will complete their endeavor and save the farm for future generations.

The Trust's deputy director, Aileen Chase, said that the group is about \$400,000 short of a final payment due to farm owner Carl O'Neil. The deadline for the funds was today, January 5, but Chase said that O'Neil has allowed the group some flexibility in collecting the final dollars in order to preserve the 140-acre farm and set up a non-profit corporation to oversee it in the future.

"We'll go ahead and sign the purchase and sale agreement and close on the farm in the near future," said Chase. "Carl has allowed us to be a little late seeing as we are \$400,000 short, but with the understanding that the money is raised."

So far, the Trust has made an initial payment of over \$1.4 million last August for a financial interest in the farmland, raised through private donations and the sale of plywood cows to those who donate \$3,000. Last month, the Trust unveiled its latest fundraiser, the sale of 1,300 collectable milk bottles for \$60 each, which Chase said has been a big success.

"I've never been so amazed," she said. "We've been out there in the cold and people have just responded so well. On Christmas Eve day, there were two of us out there at the A&P Plaza and in an hour, I'd raised about \$700 and another volunteer had raised \$1,100-

1,200, so that's about \$2,000 in a small window of time."

The Trust has raised \$200,000 in a little under a month through the sale of the bottles and other private donations, but still needs \$400,000 to complete the final payment to O'Neil. The actual sum due is \$2.9 million, but two million of that will come from Duxbury's Community Preservation Act funds, approved at June's Special Town Meeting, and a state agricultural preservation program. In addition, donors have contributed \$300,000 in commitments to the Trust.

"My big fear is that people will think that this is over," said Chase. "Duxbury has been incredibly generous to us and we are ready to put this project to bed, but we really need that last \$400,000."

To achieve the final amount of funding, Chase said that the milk bottles will remain on sale as long as they are available and that a neighborhood campaign is also underway for individual streets, groups of streets or neighborhood associations to donate \$1,000. For their efforts, said Chase, they will be included on a bronze plaque at the entrance to the farm.

Chase said that once the payment is made to O'Neil, the non-profit group will be established as the former Duxbury fire chief plans to donate one million dollars of his own money to establish an endowment to get the group up and running to manage the farm and its operations.

"This is our final phase," said Chase. "We are always looking for more angels as so many have already come forward and will keep working to raise the final sum."

For more information on the O'Neil farm milk bottles or the Trust's preservation efforts, call Aileen Chase at 781-934-9018 or go to www.wildlandstrust.org.

Duxbury Clipper

Wednesday, January 5, 2005